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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ: FIRST DUTCH SOLDIER KILLED

Classified By: POL COUNSELOR MARY E. DALY FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) (D)

1. (U) A Dutch soldier on patrol near the town of As Samawah was killed May 10 when hand grenades were thrown into the open vehicle in which he was driving; others in his patrol were injured. This is the first death of a Dutch soldier in Iraq, and the first death of any Dutch soldier in action in many years -- some say the first since Srebrenica in 1995. The Prime Minister cut short his vacation in Malta to return home and the Defense Minister cut short an official trip to Romania. In a statement to the press the evening of May 11, PM Balkenende expressed sympathy to the soldier's friends and family, praised the efforts of "brave" Dutch troops in working to bring stability to Iraq, and said this attack was not by the Iraqi people but by a few who want to sow "ruin and destruction." He also quoted extensively from a message from the Iraqi governor of al Muthanna (where Dutch troops are). According to PM Balkenende, the Iraqi governor said the attack affects Iraqis as much as Dutch. The Prime Minister ended his statement by praising Dutch cooperation with Iraqis on the ground, and declaring that these kinds of incidents cannot stop the Netherlands from doing its work. He took one question afterward about the effect of the death on the government's impending decision about whether to extend Dutch troops beyond their July 15 mandate. PM Balkenende replied that the government would look at all factors and was working towards a bigger UN role, a new UN resolution, and a request from the Iraqis to stay. He said the GONL's goal is to strengthen the legitimacy of the multinational force.

Timeline for Decision on Extending Dutch Troops

2. (C) The cabinet begins discussion Friday, May 14 on whether to extend the Dutch force in Iraq beyond July 15, when the current mandate ends. For logistical reasons, they need to make their decision by the end of May and then discuss with parliament. Normally, deployment decisions are made with a super majority, but the opposition Labor Party in recent weeks has expressed serious doubts about a renewal, absent a significantly expanded UN role. Worse, D-66, a small but influential government coalition party is also beginning to waver. Doubters range from those with concerns about the safety of the troops and treatment of prisoners to those with an eye on the June EU parliament elections, which are seen as a straw poll on the relative strength of the PM's Christian Democrats and the opposition Labor party, currently the second largest party in the Netherlands.

Comment

3. (C) The Prime Minister and Defense and Foreign Ministers are committed to troop extension, but need to convince the cabinet first and then parliament. As the Prime Minister made clear in his press statement May 11, they want and need a new UN resolution, as well as a clear indication that Iraq wants the multinational force to stay. Both D-66 and Labor repeatedly express a desire for a greater UN role in Iraq. As for the Dutch military, they have told us that such an incident was anticipated, and that, in their view, it should not alter the decision to go forward with renewal, which the military supports. Nevertheless, all concede that this is a political decision and the government's ability to prevail in parliament will be a function of events on the ground in Iraq and the state of play within the UN.

SOBEL